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CORRESPONDENCE.

MONTEFALCO IN UMBRIA.

Favourably placed on the summit of a commanding eminence Montefalco has established the right to be entitled the *Ringhiera Umbra*, or, as we should say, the Balcony of Umbria. It is girdled with a continuous circle of cities, all of which are familiar by their names to every lover of Italian mediæval art. Perugia, Assisi, Spello, Foligno, Trevi, Spoleto, Bevagna are at your feet. Behind them looms a never-ending range of rugged mountains covered with sparkling snow. Some days the vast valley is choked with a filmy vapour, out of which rise the pale forms of the underlying cities like seaports washed by the rising tide. Here and there a lofty hill in the middle distance, oak and olive crowned, emerges as an island from the waters. Above the mist level Montefalco towers bathed in dazzling sunlight, and its glittering walls, and *Campanili* are seen painted on the glowing expanse of the intensely deep blue sky. Uncared for in evil times treasures of art still exist inherited from the best period of Italian excellence.

Long ago the Provincial Deputation of Fine Arts declared "that the Church of San Francesco of Montefalco was superior in the beauty of its frescoes to all the churches of Umbria, except that of San Francesco of Assisi:" but it did nothing to preserve these for future ages.

In the choir of this church are Benozzo Gozzoli's great frescoes depicting the life of San Francesco, very erroneously described and confused by Milanese, in his note to Vasari's life of the painter, with the frescoes by the same master in a side chapel dedicated to San Girolamo. From the portraits in this choir have often been borrowed for imitation in modern times the features of Giotto, Dante, and Petrarca, under which triad are written these inscriptions, "*Pictorum eximius Jottus fundamentum et lux.*" "*Theologus Dantes nullius dogmatis expers.*" "*Laureatus Petrarca omnium virtutum monarca.*" The date of these frescoes is 1452, and in the monastery of San Fortunato, the patron saint of this city, is another dated 1450, showing the period of Benozzo Gozzoli's residence here. Besides this church there are Sant' Illuminata, San Leonardo, Sant' Agostino, and others with less claims to notice.

One of the best pictures by Benozzo Gozzoli is in San Giovanni Laterano at Rome, sent as a gift to Pope Pius IX in exchange for the barren honor granted by him of styling Montefalco a full-fledged *City*.

Perugino, Spagna, Tiberio d'Assisi, Fra Angelico, Mezastris of Foligno are well represented here, but Montefalco had its own special art-genius Francesco Melanzio, and nowhere else can he be studied. Melanzio was a pupil of Perugino, and the Madonnas he painted possesses a grace and beauty truly Raphaelesque. I will name the one in the Chapel of the Piazza as transcendent, but there are many others little inferior. Two in the small picture gallery show a great contrast and demand much faith that they are from the same hand. Both are signed and dated by him, but his progress between the five years marked on them 1487 and 1492 is almost incredible.

I have a copy of a letter dated 16th Dec., 1878, from the Director of the Dresden Art Gallery, L. Gruner, addressed to the excellent syndic Signor Loreti, which manifests his interest in Melanzio's work. He regrets his scanty knowledge of this painter, and quotes the only reference he can discover, which is in *Mezzanotte's* Life of Perugino published at Perugia in 1836, naming him as "Vannucci's scholar," and the probable date of his death about 1525. This statement is confirmed in a Latin MS in the possession of the Marchese Francesco degli Abati in 1796. Melanzio painted all, or nearly all, the Church of Santa Illuminata. The second chapel to the left as you enter, with a *Prespio* in the centre, and on the sides the *Flight into Egypt*, and *Adoration of the Magi*, is a gem of the choicest art.

Professor Adamo Rossi, late architect of Perugia, sedulously attempted to trace this artist's career, and the results were intended to appear in the *Archivio Storico dell' Arte*. I do not know if his death in March, 1891, interrupted his intention. It is authenticated that he completed a *Maestà*, or wayside shrine in 1447: that he had a dispute which was settled by arbitration on 26th Feb., 1499: that on the 12th Nov., 1512, he made a payment on behalf of his wife, Maria Antonia di Pierantonio di Jacopo: that on the 24th May, 1514, he began to paint the Chapel of Santa Chiaretta in the Church of Sant' Agostino: that on the 7th Sept., 1515, he signed his name with date upon a picture over the high altar in the Church of San Leonardo: that in 1515 he signed the fresco on the third altar of the Church of Sant' Illuminata: that on the 21st Jany., 1516, he gave a receipt in his wife's name for fifty florins bequeathed to her by an aunt, Silvestra of Spoleto: that in Feb., 1517, he contracted with Bonifazio di Cuppis to paint and gild a picture and chapel in Santa Illuminata. All these notices are extracted from original notarial documents, signed and dated, which I need not further particularize.

On the 6th of May, 1888, the Communal Council of Montefalco decreed to raise a monument to the memory of its illustrious painter in his native city.

Half the frescoes in Montefalco are obliterated by dense layers of abominable whitewash; and would that I could truly speak well of the preservation of those which remain; but I am glad to say that the Minister of Public Instruction has since my visit sent an inspector to report on the Church of San Francesco, which is now inscribed on the list of Italian National Monuments. Moreover, its condition is infinitely superior to that of the Church of Sant' Illuminata, where the frescoes of Melanzio are crumbling off the damp walls for want of a trifling expenditure. Strange it is, but literally true, that in Montefalco are slowly perishing the noblest works of pictorial art, which in a London salesroom would be coveted and purchased for sums of money, a fraction whereof would pay for their safe-keeping in situ.

I am no believer in ineffectual word-analysis of pictures; they must be seen,—and a drive of two hours from the railway station at Foligno is not far to go for a glimpse of the artistic beauties Montefalco richly owns, until time and longer neglect shall fade them out of sight for ever.

Rough and uncouth as the Umbrian peasant roundabout here is, still as he walks the lovely country lanes in his dirty white smock, he carries within his innermost soul a dull consciousness, which lightens up with an encouraging word, that his Montefalco contains a mine of treasure which he ought to be proud of. His life and his habitation are hard and squalid, but acorn-gathering, and the despoiling of olive trees, have not quite killed the knowledge that his churches are made sacred by something bright. His voice and dialect are strident and repellent, but his "*Buon passeggio*" grumbled forth surlily as you encounter him is as sincere as the never-failing courteous "*Buon giorno à lei*" of his Tuscan neighbour; whilst underneath the Umbrian husk there is the virtue of hard labour, and its fruits are in the smiling landscape surrounding you on every side.

The Falcon which a pretty legend records to have flown in at the open window of a room where the Elders sat in council on the choice of a name to give their city when rebuilt was long a bird of doubtful omen; for in after times Montefalco bitterly groaned under the tyrannies of the Trinci family (lords of Foligno); and the ruin wrought by Martelli of the Black Bands instigated by the fierce Baglioni of Perugia; besides the dread pestilences that twice, in 1464 and 1529, devastated it; until at last it passed beneath a milder sway, and is now a place for few ambitions save peaceful ones.

WILLIAM MERCER..

Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, 1892.

NOTE TO THE ABOVE.—I would add to the interesting letter of Mr. Mercer a line regarding the inscriptions on these frescoes at Montefalco, merely for the convenience of readers, regretting that there was no time to ask it of Mr. Mercer's more competent hand.

At S. Francesco, on the S. wall near the door, is the signature of Tiberio d'Assisi, showing that he worked here in 1510: A. D. M.CCCCX. *Tiberius de Asisio pinxit.* At S. Fortunato we find the same signature, the only difference being that the date is two years later, 1512. These frescoes are in the chapel of S. Francesco. Montefalco is perhaps the best place to study Benozzo Gozzoli. One of his two frescoes at S. Fortunato has the inscription [*Opus*] *Benotii de Florentia*, MCCCC. At S. Francesco, Gozzoli's name as the painter of the choir is thus given on the right-hand pilaster: *In nomine sanctissime Trinitatis hanc cappellam pinxit Benotius Florentinus sub annis Domini millesimo quadringentesimo quinquagesimo secundo; qualis sit pictor prefatus inspice lector.* In the vault and on the walls of the right aisle are frescoes by Gozzoli, signed and dated as follows in the sixth vault, which is the chapel of S. Jerome: *Constructa atque depicta est hec cappella ad honorem gloriosi Hyeronimi*, M.CCCC.LII *die primo novembris*, while in the frieze of the cornice is the signature: *Opus Benotii de Florentia.*

It should be noticed that there are works by the schools of Cimabue and Giotto at S. Francesco.

I would add also a few words to Mr. Mercer's very appreciative notice of Francesco Melanzio, a native of Montefalco, and none of whose signed works appear elsewhere in Umbria, to my knowledge. Mr. Mercer repeats Mezzanotti's statement that the date of Melanzio's death is about 1525. Unless the inscription in the apse of S. Fortunato has been tampered with he is shown to have been still painting in the year 1528. This inscription reads, according to Guardabassi (*Mon. dell' Umbria*): *Franciscus M. de Montefalco pinxit* M.CCCCC.XXVIII, and the subject of this charming painting is the Virgin enthroned holding the Child with three saints on each side. His signature on the painting in S. Leonardo is: *Franciscus Mel. Mont. Falc. pinxit anno Domini millesimo quingentesimo decimo quinto, die septima septembris.* The subject of this tempera painting on canvas is the Virgin and Child enthroned: on the throne are four angels crowning the Virgin, while four angels are singing above the throne: on each side are four saints in three rows. In the church of S. Maria Melanzio painted in fresco the niche behind the high altar. His signature, which is not dated, reads: *Franciscus Melantius de Montefalco pinsit.* The subject is: above, God the Father in a glory of angels, blessing; below, the Virgin and Child, enthroned, with two angels, while on the left S. Fortunatus is saying mass. At S. Illuminata, where there are such

beautiful works by this artist, the first niche on the right contains the inscription: *Anno Domini Millesimo quingentesimo xv Franciscus Melan-
tius P.* It is a question whether the frescoes in the next niche, dated 1505, and those in the last niche on the right, dated 1509, may not be earlier works by Melanzio.

Finally it is interesting to note that side by side with the works of the Florentine, Perugian and native schools, there are examples of the schools of Gubbio (*e. g.*, S. Francesco in third vault) and Foligno (Ch. of Turruta), so that we can obtain in Montefalco a good view of several sides of the development of Italian painting from 1450 to 1525.

[ED.]

LETTERS FROM GREECE.

I.

No visitor with archæological interests, returning to Athens in the autumn of 1892 after an absence of three or four years, could have failed to be impressed by the progress made at the museums, especially the National Museum on the Patissia road. To begin with external appearances, the facade, which is only in part of marble, has been made presentable by receiving on its unsightly rubble the predestined covering of stucco; and the space in front, formerly crowned with ancient grave-stones, has been cleared, enclosed by a low wall and tastefully laid out with fountains and flower-beds. Passing in, one finds fifteen rooms filled with sculptures and accessible to the general public. Probably few but specialists have any conception of the great and growing wealth of this magnificent collection. Among the additions of the past two or three years are several of noteworthy importance. From Melos comes an Archaic male figure of the so-called Apollo type, misleadingly referred to in this JOURNAL, Vol. VII, p. 526, as a pugilist. This figure is better preserved than any other of its class, except the "Apollo" of Tenea in Munich, being unbroken and substantially intact, except for the loss of the right leg below the knee and the left foot. It is considerably over life-size. In style it is most nearly related to the "Apollo" of Thera, though decidedly more advanced. Rhamnus has furnished several statues, including a large Themis, dating from the end of the fourth or beginning of the third century. It is an imposing figure, though rather hard and soulless. Three colossal heads and a piece of drapery ornamented with reliefs, all from the temple of Despoina at Lykosoura, offer a difficult problem to archæologists. Numerous other fragments belonging to the same group remain at the place of their discovery. It is practically certain